

In The Nation

Practicing Candor as Well as Preaching It

By ARTHUR KROCK

WASHINGTON, May 1—Samplings by this department of bipartisan Congressional opinion on any commitment of United States military forces in Laos have disclosed an almost unanimous belief that this should not be undertaken. The samplings have been random and casual, but nearly all the replies have run one way.

This opinion was solidly expressed to President Kennedy last week when he reviewed the alternatives of Laos policy with a group of the leaders of Congress. But it was Senator Fulbright, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, who put this viewpoint importantly on the public record and supported the now-emerging alternative of submitting the Laos crisis to the United Nations. When the conditions of combat logistics and terrain were very bad, he said, and the people and armed forces of a country showed little interest in preserving their independence, or whether they lost it to a foreign dictatorship, no military intervention by the United States should even be contemplated.

Under Other Circumstances

On all these counts, said Senator Fulbright (John F. Kennedy made the same in a Senate speech in 1954), he opposed any such undertaking in Laos. But in South Vietnam, Thailand and Burma these factors were in reverse. Therefore, if these governments, being expressions of the popular will, requested this United States aid as necessary to preserve their independence, he would favor it. But his rare and refreshing candor on "Meet the Press" yesterday did not stop there.

He volunteered an opinion on a situation which Presidents, United States diplomats and most legislators have seldom ventured to discuss critically. Noting that India is the most important non-Communist nation in Asia, Senator Fulbright wondered aloud why Prime Minister Nehru does not take the lead in trying to preserve the independence of Laos. "Why must it be us?" he inquired, and reverted to this pertinent question. This was an important entry in a record where United

States timorousness in dealing with the caprices of the Prime Minister stands in striking contrast with the generosity of United States aid to India and with Nehru's proclivity to criticize this country's efforts to stem the spread of international communism there and elsewhere.

A Profile in Courage

But Senator Fulbright gave an even more impressive demonstration of his conviction that the times call for candor without regard to politics or persons. He is a Democrat, one of the President's strongest supporters, and his intimate counselor and friend. Nevertheless, the Senator gave these straightforward answers to other questions:

1. The President and his Administration have failed to inform the American people in essential detail of the current crisis and what is required of them to surmount it. Though the President complained that President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon spoke in general terms wholly inadequate to the need and the purpose, and failed to "follow through," he has invited the same charge. If the American people are told "where we are and what we have to do," and only if they hear this from the President, they will be "eager and anxious to respond."

2. The means are readily available to the President—the special program facilities of television and the printing press, and the regular White House news conferences, for "educational talks" in which the President is uniquely effective.

3. The Central Intelligence Agency blundered enormously in the anti-Castro landings in Cuba. And henceforth the agency should be confined to collecting intelligence and excluded from any operation of policy.

Senator Fulbright did not say so yesterday, but another error by the President's aides in planning for the Cuban undertaking was their failure to advise Fulbright. However, hearing rumors of the impending project, he wrote a strong protest to the President and was then invited to make it in person.